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The Incarnation and grace



“Cheap grace is the deadly enemy of our Church. We are fighting today for costly grace. . . . Cheap grace means grace as a doctrine, a principle, a system. It means forgiveness of sins proclaimed as a general truth, the love of God taught as the Christian ‘conception’ of God. An intellectual assent to that idea is held to be of itself sufficient to secure remission of sins. The Church which holds the correct doctrine of grace has, it is supposed, *ipso facto* a part in that grace. In such a Church the world finds a cheap covering for its sins; no contrition is required, still less any real desire to be delivered from sin. Cheap grace therefore amounts to a denial of the living Word of God, in fact, a denial of the Incarnation of the Word of God. . . . Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate. . . . Costly grace . . . is *costly* because it calls us to follow, and it is *grace* because it calls us to follow *Jesus Christ*. . . . It is costly because it condemns sin, and grace because it justifies the sinner. Above all, it is *costly* because it cost God the life of his Son . . . and what has cost God much cannot be cheap for us. Above all, it is *grace* because God did not reckon his Son too dear a price to pay for our life, but delivered him up for us. Costly grace is the Incarnation of God.” – Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (Macmillan, 1949)

Missouri’s Magisterium strikes out



In his book *Catholic Matters*, Richard Neuhaus described his understanding, even in boyhood, that as a Lutheran he had more in common with the Spooner brothers, his Roman Catholic friends, than he had with his Protestant friends. Among the most important commonalities was a Magisterium, a teaching authority. While for the Catholics it was the Pope, Missouri Synod Lutherans looked to the faculty of Concordia Seminary. “It seemed quite natural to inquire about ‘our position’ on this or that,” Neuhaus recalled, because “the Missouri Synod had an answer to just about any question you could think to ask. And every answer was surrounded by a praetorian guard of biblical citations. So it was *sola scriptura* after all, as correctly interpreted by the Magisterium.”

I’m too young to recall the coup personally, but at some point, as history buffs know, the Concordia faculty became an unreliable pope of Lutheranism. It was deposed by the synod and replaced by the Commission on Theology and

Church Relations (CTCR), but the sense of Magisterium remained. As a church-planter I consulted CTCR documents frequently in the process of starting a new congregation, and it was nice to have a little “this is our position” pamphlet available on whatever topic or question might come up.

Like bad poetry

The 2007 Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod (LCMS) Convention asked the CTCR “to develop a biblical and confessional report on responsible Christian stewardship of the environment,” and the resulting document, *Together with All Creatures* (TWAC), has just been released. Based on my past experiences with CTCR documents, I thought this one would be a handy and timely theological explanation of our views on various practical and disputed environmental questions.

Would that it aspired to such heights. Instead, it laments environmental destruction in general. It praises eco-diversity. It points out how glorious the landscape is and how nice it is to be near plants. It exults like a student doing a poetry assignment: *With our ears we can hear the song of the wolf howling that may send chills down our spine, the primal “kuk kuk kuk” of a pileated woodpecker, or the sound of leaves rustling in the wind. With our tongues we can taste and enjoy the sweet tartness of blueberries in June or a finely aged wine “to gladden the heart of man” (Ps. 104:15). With our sense of smell we can take in the sweet fragrance of lilacs in spring or the odor of decaying leaves in the fall. With our eyes we can stand in awe before the jagged vistas of the Canadian Rockies or marvel in the delicate petals of a rose.* [p. 60]

Such language is not a declaration or explanation of our position on anything in particular, but simply offers heartfelt exhortation to LCMS folks to be more sympathetic to nature and the environmental movement in general. When it comes to being green, says TWAC, we’re on board. We’re with the program. We get it. That’s what this document has to say to anyone who was asking.

A new kind of statement

I should have known right off that I was not dealing with a normal CTCR document. With painstaking attention to font coolness, without any capital letters, and with a cheery picture of the globe with animals and trees on it, the glossy cover made it

clear that reading TWAC would be the Schoolhouse Rock equivalent of those dusty, prosaic position papers with boring covers that the CTCR used to put out. But the last one or two CTCR documents have also had glossy, arty covers, so maybe it’s just new CTCR policy.

But then there was the length of the thing. This document represents an entirely different genre. It isn’t a report or a pamphlet, it is a small book. At 160 pages (including the appendix) it is almost three times longer than the next longest (and next most recent) CTCR document on my shelf. So maybe that is another trend; they’re getting longer as they get glossier and less dogmatic. One shudders to make the comparison, but it is more than twelve times as long as the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America’s 1993 social statement on the environment. That’s a lot of paper about recycling.

But that’s fine – however long it takes to arrive at theologically substantive, practical answers on controversial matters, right? Most of the CTCR documents do just that. And historically, if you trust the Magisterium and just want to know “our” answer to a specific question, you turn to the very back of the relevant CTCR document first and check out the conclusions in a nutshell.

Say, for example, you want to know what the LCMS says about prayers that address God as “Mother.” You open up the CTCR document on *Biblical Revelation and Inclusive Language*, turn to the very back, and read the list of general and specific conclusions, where you learn “The First Person of the Trinity is to be addressed as ‘Father’ rather than as ‘Parent’ or ‘Mother.’” There. That’s our answer. If you want to know why, you can look back into the meat of the document, but if you simply trust the Magisterium, you can happily move on to the next question.

CTCR documents almost always end with some sort of practical summary, glossary of terms, or a Q&A on matters of debate. But what does TWAC end with? A hymn. The summary of our position on environmentalism is a hymn? What the...?

Questions, no answers

So I started looking through the whole thing for where there might be answers to questions. Nothing. Rather, the various sections end with inserted text boxes of “Thoughts to Ponder and Things

to Do" in the manner of a grade school curriculum. The appendix is actually a separate children's Bible study/activities guide on environmentalism. (For some reason an earlier CTCR document on euthanasia didn't bother with that.) But the entire practical aspect of TWAC takes the form of suggestions or observations, rather than statements.

For example, in the section on "Creaturely Kindness" under "Treating Kindly the Animals in Our Care," we read the concluding paragraph: *How are laboratory animals, used in experimentation for cures and cosmetics, treated? How do we treat the animals that we hunt? Are they simply economic commodities? God allowed us to kill the beasts of the field and forest for food, but not to kill only for the sake of killing. There is also the issue of the direct treatment of animals within our care, namely, pets and those that are used for experimentation. How do we care for pets and other animals? In most states, dog fighting and cock fighting have been outlawed but puppy mills often remain unregulated. Tens of thousands of cats are released into the wild or dumped along the roadside.* [p. 99]

So our position is . . . what, exactly? Anti-cat-dumping? That puppy mills should be regulated? That we should love our pets? What about trophy hunting or wearing fur, which require killing neither for food nor merely for the sake of killing? It doesn't say. *How do we care for pets and other animals?* I, for one, feed my dog and pet her regularly, which answers more of the CTCR's questions to me than they answer of mine to them. This document seems content to point out issues and ask suggestive questions, as though the goal is merely to get everyone thinking about the topic and excited to join the movement.

The uses of vagueness

The writing throughout the document adopts this approach of suggestive hinting without coming right out and saying anything. The point seems to be to get the reader thinking in new categories favorably disposed to a green ethos. It concludes with questions. It suggests rather than asserts. It simply quotes people, especially Wendell Berry (who may as well be the thirteenth Apostle for how often he shows up in TWAC), without necessarily endorsing the content of the quote. In this way it comes across more as a theme party—just compiling things around a theme and trying to get people to

"get into it."

Even when TWAC tries to be helpful in a concrete way, it can't bring itself to say anything useful. For example, in "Caring for God's Living Earth" it addresses the Psalms and the earth declaring the glory of God: *This suggests that we deal with the earth in such a way that we do not muffle the voice of creation as it makes its Creator known or diminish the glory of God by diminishing His handiwork.* [p. 48] Okay, but nobody gets up in the morning looking for ways to diminish the glory of God. What constitutes "muffling the voice of creation"? What, exactly, diminishes His handiwork? It doesn't say.

The next paragraph illustrates the same pussy-footing around the issue when it notes: *We might make certain lifestyle choices that promote the health of the earth's ecosystems or at the very least minimize the damage inflicted upon them.* Doesn't say we will. Doesn't even say we should. But by golly, we might. And probably would, too, if "certain lifestyle choices" weren't such a vague phrase. But vagueness is fine if the goal is simply to generate enthusiasm.

This is incredible!

Or here's another instance: *Consider . . . the metalmark butterfly as found in Costa Rica. The metalmark butterfly is an easy target for wasps which often kill it, carve it up, and take it back as food for their larvae. But when the caterpillar is in its third instar, it secretes a honeydew-like substance that ants love. In fact, the ants will often stroke a particular spot on the caterpillar which causes it to secrete the sweet liquid. In return, the ants defend the caterpillar against the wasps, often staying with the caterpillar for a week or more and attacking any wasp that comes near. This is incredible!* [p. 80]

Really? You mean if the United Methodists were to adopt a resolution in their General Conference declaring the cooperation of metalmark butterflies and ants to be "altogether predictable and boring," they would just be wrong? Yep. Our position is, "This is incredible!" It doesn't say why ants greedily hogging all the honeydew while the poor wasp children starve is a good thing. The reader is simply supposed to absorb the spirit of the exclamation point (they are littered liberally throughout the document) and be wowed by the complexity and beauty of nature.

Not just for weirdos

Why publish an exhortatory speech instead of a position paper? Well, I think it is clear that the LCMS is, for a variety of reasons, considered both politically and culturally conservative, while environmentalism is a cause more often associated with political and cultural liberalism. But environmentalism is our issue, too, CTCR insists. Like a mandatory diversity seminar at freshman orientation, TWAC seeks first and foremost to change attitudes, and it does this by simply getting LCMS types comfortable taking part in the ongoing eco-discussion. It is as though the synod officials are saying, "So you see, children, that lady with the wrap-around skirt and ponytail shopping for fair trade coffee at the organic farmers' market might not be a Communist or a Wiccan as you've hitherto been led to believe; she might be a Christian worthy of emulation. It's okay, even good, to recycle and compost. That green stuff isn't just for weirdos anymore."

The synopsis/outline at the beginning of the document provides the following conclusion: *We live as Christians who embrace our calling as human creatures to care for the earth in the certain hope that the new creation in Christ will be completed by the Holy Spirit.* The theological substance basically amounts to a celebration of the first article of the creed. The assumption is that we pay lots of attention to justification and sanctification, but not to creation. This needs to change. Quite apart from sin and forgiveness, caring for the earth is simply part and parcel of the calling to be human, and the Judeo-Christian story provides the context and motivation to do just that. But beyond that, there is little guidance.

Save the elephants

The great debate, the elephant in the room of eco-consciousness, is the issue of human overpopulation. Every mainstream environmental group has a statement on that subject, and most are very dedicated, to the point of obsession, to the goal of reducing the number of people on the planet. But of course, that discussion goes back to fundamental values, the nature of consumption and "footprints," and the relationship between humanity and the rest of creation, and often puts orthodox Christianity at odds with modern environmentalism. Here is where a confessional, Biblical voice in the environmental debate could provide much-needed clarity. The

CTCR stepped up to the plate. And struck out looking. At best it was a check-swing.

Consider the entirety of what it says about the relationship between care for the environment and population control: *Population issues also factor into the issue of human consumption. Obviously, as the population increases, more of the world's land, food, and water must be consumed. We are the first generation in history to see the population of the world double in our own lifetimes. By 2050 it is estimated there will be more than nine billion people on earth. Christians may debate and even disagree about the way in which the mandate to be fruitful and multiply continues to apply to the modern world. But the problem is not simply that of population alone . . . [p. 89]*

Again, TWAC isn't really saying anything. It's just noting that there are an awful lot of people crowding the planet and a lot of problems would be solved if they weren't around. But the "Things to Do" insert on p. 103 recommends that LCMS folks support the World Wildlife Fund. A very brief tour of their website yielded seven dense pages of material from nearly every section of the website, all describing their efforts to reduce the human population. If you look past the pictures of tigers and elephants to see what it is they actually do with their money, it turns out advocating for smaller families and working to provide "reproductive health services" (read: birth control and abortion) to the Third World are among their main activities. So the CTCR, while carefully noting that Christians can and do disagree about saving the planet by eliminating people from it, nevertheless recommends we send money to people who work tirelessly to reduce the human population. Great.

Game-changer

I suspect this CTCR report will be a game-changer throughout the synod, but in very different ways for different people. For me, it disabuses me of the notion that I live in a church like the Spooner brothers and Fr. Neuhaus grew up in, with a Magisterium that gives answers, in a church culture of assertions valued chiefly according to their truth or falsehood. Such a church body could not have produced a document like this, with its casual disregard of precise definitions, its allergy to assertions, its obliviousness to all points of actual dispute, its sociologically-driven agenda, with its ear finely tuned

to contemporary culture rather than timeless truth, leading to such a vacuous set of non-conclusions. I think it is a real loss. After returning from the 2007 Convention I had decided to work on requesting a CTCR document on the topic of artificial birth control. But if this is the sort of thing that passes for an answer to such a request, I guess I won't bother — though it might be interesting to see what they would put in the "Thoughts to Ponder and Things to Do" boxes.

But among those who were already gung-ho on environmentalism and perhaps a little irritated to be in a synod behind the times, this document will generate enthusiasm. Expect upcoming crops of pastors to have taken to heart this "Thought to Ponder and Thing to Do" from p. 112: *As a congregation, participate in a community Earth Day event so as to give witness to God's creation, our place within it, and the renewal of creation in Christ. We could devote an entire service with a liturgy centered on creation and its renewal in Christ.*

A liturgy centered on creation. I'm pretty sure we won't be doing that at my church. Nor will we take part as a congregation in a community Earth Day event, though probably many of our members attend such things on their own, which is fine with me. Oh, and I will not be sending any money to the World Wildlife Fund. Instead, I'll spend it on my six children.

Glad you asked

The foundational theology of this document is basic and non-controversial. And I'm really not opposed to 99% of the recommendations. My family plants a garden. We recycle. We conserve energy. We resist consumerism as best we can. We make every effort to appreciate nature. It isn't that I want tigers to go extinct or think that metalmark butterflies should be fried with a magnifying glass along with the ants. It is that these issues require much more serious treatment than the vague eco-posturing for which this CTCR document cheerleads.

What would have been more helpful is something like an old CTCR document, one which would have left out the multiple stories of sandhill cranes on the Platte River in Nebraska and instead tackled the relevant Biblical and theological issues — things like how the commission in Genesis to be fruitful and multiply applies to the modern world. That might have provided some useful instruction.

They could have saved a lot of paper with one sentence: "Responsible Christian stewardship of the environment is good, and we're truly glad you asked." With TWAC the primary point seems to be that it can never again be said that the LCMS doesn't give a hoot.

— by Peter Speckhard, associate editor

Why it matters



Over on Forum Online, about twice a month or so somebody rants again about the neo-gnostic teachings and liturgies of Ebenezer Lutheran Church in San Francisco — "herchurch," they call themselves (see, e.g., our discussion way back in the March, 2005 *FL*). It's never been clear to me whether the "her" in "herchurch" refers to the Goddess, the constituency, or the pastor, or maybe all three. But never mind. Every time someone brings her up, some ELCA toady will reply, in effect, "But what difference does it make to your ministry what some tiny isolated congregation in San Francisco does?" It's a fair question, and here's an answer or three.

First, it makes a difference because the Body of Christ is one. "If one member suffers, all suffer

together," some misguided misogynist said. Gnosticism is an ancient and dangerous heresy, and the worship of false gods is condemned in the harshest of language in the Scripture. It is life-threatening to the Body of Christ. To ignore a malignancy in one part of the body threatens the whole body, because cancer spreads and it can be fatal.

What is truth?

Second, it makes a difference because there really is such a thing as truth and falsehood. When the church tolerates falsehood, even in an out-of-the-way place, the church is saying, in essence, "Truth is relative. This may not fly in your neck of the woods, but in the context where this ministry takes place, it is perfectly fine." That explanation might work with

regard to some matters, but it cannot be used to justify heresies like praying to “our Mother who is within us.” Such a prayer is unacceptable in any Christian church because it is a lie. Truth matters.

For whom the bell tolls

Third, it makes a difference precisely because it is *not* an isolated instance. The “Our Mother” prayer was a part of the synodically-sponsored “reception onto the roster” service, in which three ELCA bishops participated. The pastor of her church is a pervasive presence at synod assemblies and

other events. The synodical bishop, while acknowledging that the congregation “pushes around the edges” of Lutheran practice and teaching, has failed to articulate exactly how such things can be considered appropriate in a Lutheran church, or, for that matter, in a Christian church.

So yes, it matters. It makes a difference in how we understand ourselves as Lutherans, and in how the world sees us. It is, to use a non-theological word with some rather ironic theological overtones, a disgrace.

— Richard O. Johnson, editor

Omnium gatherum



A matter of style • You may not know this, but both the ELCA and the LCMS publish “style books,” advising people who write for them how to handle various issues of spelling, punctuation, etc. (*Forum Letter* actually has a style book, too, which consists of a half-page of notes to remind me from month to month how I’ve handled various grammatical and typographical matters in previous issues. It doesn’t help much.) Anyway, one of the interesting discrepancies is that the ELCA book asks writers to refer to clergy in this form: “The Rev. Jane M. Doe.” Subsequent references are supposed to be to “Pastor Doe.” This pretty much follows the usage suggested by most writing guides (which generally eschew the usage “Rev. Doe”). The LCMS book, on the other hand, specifically dictates “do not use *the* before *Rev.*”; in other words, it must be “Rev. John Doe,” while subsequent references should just use the last name. Except, that is, in obituaries, in which case it is permissible to continue to use the title. This may be just that annoying Missouri need to be different, similar to all those places in *Lutheran Worship* and now *Lutheran Service Book* where they utilized *Lutheran Book of Worship* liturgies, but changed just a word here or a note there to make it clear that they are doctrinally and musically pure. Or at least distinctive. Or possibly these style issues actually reflect some deep doctrinal distinction here between the two bodies, perhaps demonstrating the LCMS’s lower view of the pastoral office. That rings true when you consider that the LCMS book bans the usage “Rev. Dr.” — it must be one or the other. The more elitist ELCA, on

the other hand, is willing to permit “The Rev. Dr.” but “*never* . . . unless the doctorate is an earned degree” (emphasis in the original). There’s a lot of humor to be found in both of these style books — which, I suppose, would be classed as more law than gospel (if you are ELCA) or Law than Gospel (if you are LCMS).

Liturgy conference • Mt. Olive Lutheran Church in Minneapolis sponsors an annual Liturgical Conference. This year’s event, scheduled for January 7-8, will feature Dr. Thomas Long from Candler School of Theology at Emory University. The theme is “Holy Death: The Parish and its Liturgy at the Time of Death.” If I lived near Minneapolis, it sounds like something I’d consider attending. For more information, contact mountoliveluthe1@qwest.net, or call 612-827-5919.

Löhe conference • Speaking of conferences, it’s not too early to think about the one sponsored by the International Löhe Society next summer at Concordia Seminary — Ft. Wayne. The dates are July 26-30, 2011, and the cost is \$130. For more information, contact Dr. Thomas Schattauer at Wartburg Seminary (tschattauer@wartburgseminary.edu). And if you’re a Löhe fan (and all Lutherans really should be), you might also be interested in Wolf Dietrich Knappe’s translation of Erika Geiger’s Löhe biography, recently released by Concordia Publishing House under the catchy title *Wilhelm Loeh 1808-1872*.

A lot to chew on • The recent announcement that Dr. Stan Olson will take on the presidency of Wartburg Seminary is, one hopes, a good thing for Wartburg. Olson has been a prominent and effective leader in the ELCA for decades, as seminary professor, synodical bishop, and churchwide executive. I did have to chuckle, though, at the ELCA news release comment that “he received a doctorate in 1976 from Yale University, where he wrote a dissertation on the New Testament.” Usually dissertation topics are, uh, a little more focused than that. Curious, I looked it up; his actual dissertation topic was “Confidence Expressions in Paul: Epistolary Conventions and the Purpose of 2 Corinthians.” Maybe that’s why they tried to shorten it in the press release. Maybe that’s also why I remember him at Yale always looking pretty serious. But confident.

Not unknown • The journal *First Things* – founded by previous *FL* editor Richard John Neuhaus, sometimes contributed to by my *FL* predecessor Russ Saltzman, and generally regarded as an “important” conservative intellectual journal covering religion and public life – published a November issue on higher education. They surveyed thousands of colleges, and then produced some lists of “best and worst” in various categories, as well as brief specific commentary on over 100 schools. What they were looking for was a bit different from, say, *Newsweek’s* annual college rankings. There were three categories: academic excellence, social atmosphere (which pretty much seems to mean how widespread drug and alcohol use and sexual promiscuity are on campus), and religious atmosphere (i.e., how friendly the campus is to persons of faith). The bad news is that only three Lutheran schools were mentioned in the commentary section – or maybe that’s good news, considering the comments. Valparaiso topped their list of “declining schools,” largely because “some of the faculty are trying hard to undo the school’s Lutheran heritage.” On the other hand, students “also report relatively low levels of sexual activity and alcohol, tobacco, and recreational drug use. And relatively little studying, for that matter.” St. Olaf got somewhat higher ratings, though it was panned for its website which says that religion is studied at St. Olaf “because religion has always been a major influence on the development of human societies.” Yeah, that’s rather a low view of the pur-

pose of a church college religion department. The most damning comment was reserved for Gettysburg College, where, *FT* tells us, “religious convictions are not unknown.” Concordia University Wisconsin made the list of “Schools on the Rise Filled with Excitement,” though there was no commentary to tell us what is so exciting; still, good for them. As for the rest, you can quarrel with the methodology, and even with the very idea of rating colleges in this way, but you can’t quarrel with the reality that these are not your grandmother’s church colleges.

Brave new church • In the brave new church, language is very important. You probably already learned that from the *ELW* controversies, but here’s another example. In the ELCA’s Sierra Pacific Synod, there has been, for umpteen years now, an annual “Clergy and Spouse Retreat.” It actually dates back before the ELCA, to the old American Lutheran Church South Pacific District. It was never an official judicatory-sponsored program, but something organized originally by a group of pastors and their spouses who believed that clergy marriages could use something like this. The leadership is passed around to pastors and spouses in various geographical areas, who make their own decisions about program, handle the money, deal with the retreat facility. The synod (and before that, the district) has been involved only marginally; seldom has there been any financial support, other, perhaps, than the cost of one publicity mailing and the inclusion of the event on the synod calendar. So the other day the synod newsletter includes a blurb advertising the “Rostered Leaders and Spouses/Partners Retreat.” Curious, I contacted the chair of the planning committee for the forthcoming retreat and was told that the synod refused to publicize the event unless the terminology was changed. I shouldn’t have been surprised, since we’ve already had, at least under the present bishop, an annual retreat for “spouses and partners of clergy,” hosted by the bishop’s partner, or spouse, or significant other, or whatever. Still, it’s pretty heavy-handed for the synod to dictate the very title of an event they don’t even sponsor. It’s probably also the last nail in the coffin of an event whose attendance has been declining significantly in recent years. There are many reasons for that – increasing costs, more spouses employed, but also, seems to me, and maybe most importantly, the

remarkable disappearance of the whole concept of a “clergy marriage.”

The people’s choice • It’s almost time for the annual Associated Church Press award contest, where last year *Forum Letter* was awarded “Best in Class” for newsletters. So why not let our readers get in on the fun? What articles in *Forum Letter* this year (2010) did you like the best? If you were deciding what pieces to enter in the contest, what would you choose? E-mail me at roj@nccn.net, and I’ll give your suggestions due consideration.

Braaten’s response • Last issue of *FL* we noted the rather testy and defensive remarks by Daniel Lehman, editor of *The Lutheran*, on the founding of the North American Lutheran Church, in which, among other things, he defended his decision not to accept an advertisement from Lutheran CORE publicizing the theological conference that preceded the NALC founding convention. Carl Braaten, who was heavily involved in that conference, has distributed an open letter excoriating Lehman for his editorial. “Is there something un-Lutheran,” Braaten asks, “about raising voices in protest and criticism of false teachings and practices going on in the church? That’s what theologians do. Lutheran theologians have been doing that from the get-go. Understandably, then and now the church politicians don’t like to hear it. What is the mission of *The Lutheran*? Is the ELCA beyond criticism, so that critical theological voices should be ignored, muted, and regarded as schismatic? That is what the bureaucrats charged against Luther when they tried to muzzle him. Does *The Lutheran* have a

greater obligation to heed the wishes of the bureaucrats of the ELCA than to hear the voices of its theologians? Do the bureaucrats who have served the ELCA for a few years have a greater right to address the ELCA than its theologians who have served its various educational institutions for many years?” Good questions, those, but I’d be surprised if Editor Lehman attempted to answer them. I’d even be surprised if Dr. Braaten’s letter gets mentioned in the ELCA house organ.

Independent/dependent • Oh, wait a minute. I mustn’t call *The Lutheran* a house organ of the ELCA. Right here in the letter thanking my congregation for its continued support (we maintain our every member plan), circulation director Curt Peterson tells me that the magazine is “an independent source of news and information with dependent relationships.” Yes, that clears that up.

End of the year appeal • Always at the end of the year, the American Lutheran Publicity Bureau makes a special appeal for financial support. It’s the end of the year, and so I appeal to you. Your support can take various forms. If you’re not a subscriber to the *Forum* package, subscribe. If you are a subscriber, give a gift subscription to someone you know who really needs to be reading *Lutheran Forum* and *Forum Letter*. And whoever you are, consider a tax-deductible gift, which can be given on line at www.alpb.org. Your support helps preserve this important and *really* independent (and with no dependent relationships) voice in American Lutheranism, for which we thank you. -roj

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